

We claim:

1. A guide apparatus for guiding sheets to a sheet-processing machine, including a printing machine, comprising:

a guide element to be disposed above a feed table; and

a height-adjusting device connected to said guide element for adjusting a distance between said guide element and the feed table, said height-adjusting device having a first drive and a second drive which can be actuated independently of each other.

2. The guide apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said first drive and said second drive can be coupled to each other.

3. The guide apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said first drive is a piston/cylinder unit.

4. The guide apparatus according to claim 3, including a guide on which said guide element is supported, said piston/cylinder unit having a cylinder disposed in a fixed location and a piston rod which passes through said cylinder, said piston rod having an first end interacting with said guide and a second end.

5. The guide apparatus according to claim 4, wherein said second drive has an actuating element interacting with said second end of said piston rod and an actuating motor interacting with said actuating element for displacing said actuating element in a direction of a longitudinal mid-axis of said piston rod.

6. The guide apparatus according to claim 5, wherein said piston rod and said actuating element are disposed so as to be aligned.

7. The guide apparatus according to claim 4, including a foreign-body protective apparatus which, in order to enlarge said distance between the guide element and the feed table, activates at least one of said first drive and said second drive of said height-adjusting device.

8. The guide apparatus according to claim 7, wherein said foreign-body protective apparatus activates said first drive when a force is exceeded which is directed away from the feed table (3) in a vertical direction and acts on said guide.

9. The guide apparatus according to claim 4, including a cross-member connected to said guide and said guide element is disposed on said cross-member, said cross-member can be

pivoted about an axis running transversely with respect to a sheet transport direction.

10. The guide apparatus according to claim 9, wherein said guide has a lifting device for pivoting said cross-member.

11. The guide apparatus according to claim 9, wherein said guide can be displaced in a vertical direction by said height adjusting device and has racks, including a first rack and a second rack, disposed on a drive and operator side of the sheet-processing machine and on which said cross-member is to be pivotably mounted.

12. The guide apparatus according to claim 11, including a rotatable geared shaft disposed in a fixed location, and said racks mesh with said rotatable geared shaft.

13. The guide apparatus according to claim 11, including a third rack coupled to said guide and connected to said piston rod.

14. The guide apparatus according to claim 9, wherein said guide element is clamped to said cross-member, and a distance between said guide element and a longitudinal mid-axis of said cross-member can be set.

15. The guide apparatus according to claim 14, wherein said guide element is one of a number of guide elements disposed at a distance from one another and fixed to said cross-member, and it being possible to set a distance from the longitudinal mid-axis of said cross-member individually.

16. The guide apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said guide element is a separating roller having a convex configuration.

17. The guide apparatus according to claim 9, wherein said cross-member is a front lay guard.

18. The guide apparatus according to claim 17, including a vertically adjustable brush disposed on said front lay guard.

19. The guide apparatus according to claim 3, wherein said piston/cylinder unit is a pneumatic piston/cylinder unit.

20. A method for feeding signatures to a sheet-processing machine, including a printing machine, which comprises the steps of:

providing a guide apparatus having a guide element to be disposed above a feed table and a height-adjusting device connected to the guide element for adjusting a distance

between the guide element and the feed table, the height-adjusting device having a first drive and a second drive which can be actuated independently of each other;

disposing the guide apparatus, as viewed in a transport direction of sheets, upstream of a front lay, the sheets being fed to the guide apparatus in an underlapped form;

placing the guide element at a distance from the front lay when an initial sheet of a stream of sheets runs in the guide element as viewed in the transport direction of the sheets; and

enlarging the distance between the guide element and the front lay for following sheets of the stream of sheets.

21. The method according to claim 20, which comprises automatically changing the distance between the guide element and the feed table and the distance between the guide element and the front lay.

22. The method according to claim 21, which comprises setting the distance between the front lay and the guide element steplessly.